

**Testimony of Richard Ribb,
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On behalf of the Association of National Estuary Programs

On HR 4731 - Reauthorization of the National Estuary Program

**Before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee**

**United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.**

July 8, 2004

Good afternoon, my name is Richard Ribb, Director of the Narragansett Bay National Estuary Program and Vice-Chair for Organizational Affairs for the Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP). On behalf of the Association, I would like to express my appreciation to Chairman Duncan and Ranking Member Costello as well to the other Subcommittee members for this opportunity to highlight the successes of the National Estuary Program in protecting and restoring our Nation's estuaries and to express support for HR 4731 - a bill that extends the National Estuary Program authorization period.

The Association of National Estuary Programs is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting stewardship and a common vision for the preservation of the nation's bays and estuaries. Our members include representatives of industry, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and the greater business community, who volunteer their time to develop and implement comprehensive management plans for a network of nationally significant estuaries.

This bill, introduced by Congressman Gerlach and Congresswoman Tauscher, deals with reauthorization of the National Estuary Program, created under the Clean Water Act and administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in close partnership with State and local governments, interested citizens and the business community. A key strength of the National Estuary Program is a collaborative and non-regulatory approach that has been proven to be successful in restoring the nation's estuaries. The introduction of this bill demonstrates Congressman Gerlach's and Congresswoman Tauscher's continuing dedication to and leadership on the protection and enhancement of the nation's coastal resources and estuaries. These legislators, along with other estuary and coastal champions like Congressman Saxton, have consistently taken action to support the protection and restoration of our bays, sounds and estuaries.

At Stake: the Health of Our Nation's Estuaries

It is well established that estuaries are the biologically essential, economically priceless, but fragile connections between the continent and the oceans. The entire nation is served by coastal estuaries

in numerous ways, such as commercial and recreational fishing, transportation, defense, boating, research and learning, and providing irreplaceable wildlife and fisheries habitat. Over half of the U.S. population lives in our coastal counties and that percentage is increasing. While there have been significant advances in environmental protection for our coasts, these coastal population increases have translated into loss of habitat, more water pollution and overall increasing pressures on our coastal resources.

With strong Congressional support, the National Estuary Program has been a front line response to the pressures on our coastal ecosystems. This program represents a successful approach to defining and addressing the problems in our estuaries. Citizens, municipalities, environmental groups and interested business and industry organizations are brought together with State and Federal governments to reach agreement on long-term management plans that seek to guarantee the economic and biological productivity of the nation's estuaries into the future. Forty-two percent of the continental United States shoreline is within the watersheds of the NEP's 28 estuaries. Economically, these estuaries of national significance produce over \$7 billion in revenue from commercial and recreational fishing and related marine industries; tourism and recreation in these NEPs are valued at over \$16 billion annually. These programs are clearly an important factor in at least a quarter of the nation's inland and coastal watersheds. And, through its national network of programs, the lessons learned in the NEP are being transferred to other collaborative watershed efforts.

The National Estuary Program is a broad-based program, taking a comprehensive approach to addressing the wide range of problems facing the Nation's estuaries: preventing habitat degradation and loss of recreational and commercial fisheries; protecting and improving water quality; pioneering watershed management techniques; controlling sewage outfalls and septic system impacts; mitigating impacts from increasing land development; developing strategies to deal with invasive species and harmful algal blooms - the list goes on and reflects the inter-related nature of these problems and the community-based nature of the NEP approach.

The National Estuary Program is clearly not the "command-and-control" type of EPA program. Rather, it is a program where local governments, citizens and the private sector come together and agree on how to manage the Nation's estuaries and on how to craft local solutions to common coastal problems. These agreed-upon priority actions toward solutions are embodied in Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans (CCMPs) developed through the NEP collaborative process. Only with the full support of the local sector is the proposed CCMP submitted to the state governors and the EPA Administrator for approval. Thus, it is the States, in close coordination with the local stakeholders and the Federal government, that create and implement new, non-adversarial and cost-effective estuary management plans, in contrast to the "command-and-control", top-down approach to environmental protection. The NEP process, built upon local roots but connected to state and federal resources, has been widely recognized as an effective method for meeting local and regional needs. In fact, the recently released U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy preliminary report recognizes the importance of the National Estuary Program and specifically notes that "the NEP concentrates on bringing together stakeholders in particular areas that are in or approaching a crisis situation. The assessment and planning process used by the National Estuary Program holds promise for the future of ecosystem-based management."

The management plan for each of these 28 NEPs is unique, but they share many characteristics in that they are all based on sound science, all created by local stakeholder groups in partnership with the relevant regulatory agencies, and all approved by the local and State governments, private sector interests and NGOs that will be principal partners in implementation. Local citizens guide the development and implementation of their plans, and, using the abilities of their local NEPs, work to leverage Federal and State dollars with contributions from local governments and the private sector. Each of these NEPs serves as the primary technical and coordination support structure (and frequently the initiator) for a wide

web of partnerships and actions to conserve and restore the estuary. The programs have been a powerful catalyst for positive action.

The ANEP Position

HR 4731 offers a simple reauthorization of the National Estuary Program and it is strongly supported by ANEP. In 2000, Congress showed its broad support for the program by reauthorizing it until 2005 and increasing its annual authorization level to \$35 million, with the intent of providing increased resources for more effective implementation of these community-based plans which target local needs. Those of us who work everyday with citizens' groups and municipalities believe that the continued authorization provided by this measure is a critical factor in achieving restoration and protection goals for our estuaries. Through the National Estuary Program, Congress has made the federal government a real partner with the states and local communities in restoring the nation's estuarine resources.

ANEP also endorses the funding level of \$35 million annually over the reauthorization period in order to continue this successful federal partnership with state and local efforts. The basis for supporting the reauthorization and funding level is described in the sections below.

A Federal Investment in Progress and Results

Through its seventeen years of experience, the National Estuary Program has served as an effective and adaptive model for developing solutions to complex environmental problems. The NEP has been the laboratory and testing ground for the watershed management techniques now being applied across the country and it continues to introduce innovative technologies and adaptive approaches to estuary problems. Characterizing and systematically monitoring conditions, ensuring that management decisions are based on sound science, coordinating watershed actions, creatively finding project funding, promoting citizen involvement in managing public resources, and bringing local people and federal and state partners together to build solutions to estuary problems – these are all hallmarks of the NEP approach.

The 28 NEP programs have developed and used these techniques to implement their management plans, designed to improve water quality, habitat and estuarine resources. Strong federal support is critical in maintaining the success of this popular program. By maximizing and leveraging the federal investment in the management plans and local partnerships that have been created, the National Estuary Program provides real benefits to the health of the nation's estuaries and the people who live there.

Return on Investment in the National Estuary Program

Reauthorization of this effective program will truly be a sound investment in the future of the nation's estuaries. While initiated with just a dozen programs in 1987, Congress and the states recognized the value of these programs and, due to the resulting demand, the program has been expanded over time to its current roster of 28 estuaries designated as of national significance.

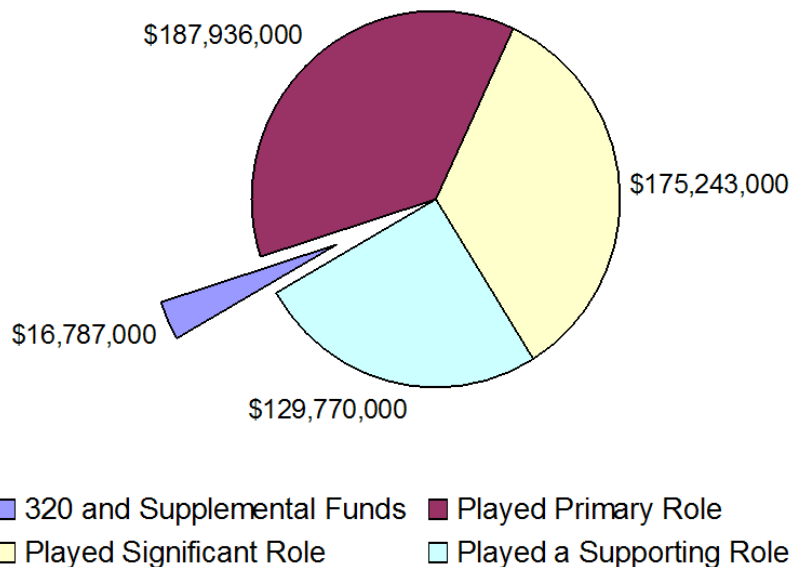
A recent analysis by EPA's Office of Oceans, Wetlands and Watersheds on leveraging in the NEP shows how effective these entrepreneurial programs have been at attracting funding and resources to add to the federal investments in coastal protection and restoration. In fact, the analysis shows that, based on the 2002 data, **the NEPs, on average, leveraged approximately \$11 dollars for each Clean Water Act dollar contributed** (refer to Leveraging Chart below), with several of the programs achieving higher ratios. There are few programs that receive federal funding that can claim that kind of return on investment. This also reflects the level of State and local commitment to the NEPs as well as recognition that these programs are an effective catalyst for action in our nation's estuaries.

Success and competence in implementing on-the-ground projects and the established technical and organizational credibility of the programs has allowed them to attract significant nonfederal resources. As one example, the Lower Columbia River Estuary Program recently received \$1.5 million from the Bonneville hydroelectric power facility to develop and implement salmon restoration projects in that estuary. In my home state of Rhode Island, the NEP has been instrumental in bringing to life and managing major coastal restoration projects, convincing the State to invest \$600,000 in a key restoration project this year. At a national scale, the NEPs have organized and implemented efforts that have restored thousands of acres of coastal habitats. In 2002 alone, the NEPs restored or protected nearly 118,000 acres of coastal watershed habitat.

National Estuary Program Leveraging Chart

\$187,936,000 with NEP in primary role

\$492,949,000 total Source: U.S. EPA



Successful leveraging also depends on successful stewardship and providing a support system for partnerships. By engaging and involving state and local governments, watershed groups and citizens, many additional resources are brought into play in addressing estuary problems. The NEP has a history of valuing community involvement and building support for initiatives. Citizens see these programs (and their staffs) as a part of a governmental structure that uses resources efficiently, is responsive to their needs, and is effective in solving problems and raising issues and awareness. NEPs have been particularly effective in identifying and funneling relevant resources (grants, technical assistance, etc.) to states, communities and citizens' groups.

In a program that has a strong history of leveraging funds, continued authorization and enhanced federal funding will allow the NEPs to bring in additional state, local and other funds to protect our estuaries. By maintaining stable support for the local NEP staff, more staff resources can be devoted to seeking out these additional funding sources and directing them toward creating solutions for estuary problems. These programs are already being called upon to deal with emerging issues such as invasive

species, harmful algal blooms and sea level rise. With enhanced funding, the NEPs could meet the growing demand for action while continuing to effectively build local solutions that satisfy identified scientific and economic needs as well as the interests of the many stakeholders in their estuaries. The NEPs form a web of action and resources that will continue to result in the kind of measurable environmental progress that we are all working to achieve.

The National Estuary Program: Securing a Sound Future for the Nation's Estuaries

The National Estuary Program has evolved into a leader in coastal protection and action over the past 17 years. Starting with four pilot programs in 1985, the success of and need for the program has led to the current status with 28 estuaries in the national program, all of which are in the implementation stage of their individual Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans. The cost of implementing the 28 CCMPs is significant and reflects the magnitude of the problems identified. Now faced with implementing these publicly- and federally-approved management plans, the need for federal funding support is greater than ever. The \$35 million funding authorization is the level realistically necessary to allow for implementation of the 28 CCMPs, as mandated by Congress.

The National Estuary Program is one of a handful of federal non-regulatory programs that truly attempt to address local concerns. This effective national network of coastal programs shares its experiences and lessons learned with each other and with other watershed and governmental organizations. It has been and, with your help, will continue to be a national resource for the protection and improvement of the nation's estuaries.

We thank the Committee members for providing us the opportunity to share our views with you. The Association of National Estuary Programs stands ready to assist the Committee as it works to pass this important legislation that will reauthorize the National Estuary Program and support continued progress on coastal resource protection and restoration.